BIRTH

842 Except in some of the economically
•847 poorest areas any increase of the family was a cause for joy- in the country not just for the immediate family, but for the whole village. However, boys were greatly preferred, especially among the mountaineers, the birth of a girl being something of a disappointment. Among the Kartvelian mountaineers, female infanticide still occurred in the nineteenth century; the Khevsur and Pshav practiced birth control mainly by abortion, no couple being allowed to have their first child until the third year of marriage, the second after seven years, while the third must be the last. During menstruation and childbirth the Khevsur women were considered unclean and were banished to special huts (called samrevlo) outside the village.

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551 The names given to children are now mostly those usual in Christian and Islamic countries, though the older custom of giving animal names to boys and terms of affection to girls has not died out, especially among the highlanders.

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842 very special festivities take place. Shooting, feasting, and dancing mark the birth
[841] of a boy; whereas no special festivities take place if a girl is born. Women, of course, come to congratulate the mother, at the same time not forgetting to console her.[16]

[574] All Lesghian peoples prefer boys too. The first one to announce the good news of the birth of a *boy* receives a reward.[17] The Avars have the courious custom according to which anyone to whom a *son* (not however a daughter) was born in the past year has to give a special feast to his neighbours in spring.[18]

The SOUTHERN CAUCASIANS. The Pshavs frequently pray and offer numerous sacrifices for the blessing of a male child, and if these supernatural means fail, there is only one thing left to do—marry a second wife, who is "capable" of giving birth to boys.[19] At a Pshav wedding the *khevis-beri* ("The Elder of the Valley") prays: "George, Angel of the Oak, grant thou a boy to
[847] the parents of a girl and another boy to the parents of a boy..."[20] Dubrovin reported that among the Georgian mountaineers baby girls were killed immediately after birth because they believed that by doing so the next child would infallibly be a boy. One could come across families who had killed as many as five girls.[21]

The OSSETES have an unusual longing for male children. Thus, for example, the Digorians are greatly disappointed when a girl is born, and this disappointment is expressed sometimes in very irreverent words by the woman-attendant. "May Mairan (Mary) be struck blind for not making you a boy! May she now provide for you a speedy death!" But then, if the following child is a boy, the woman-attendant pleads for forgiveness, "Oh, Mairan, forgive me!
585 They longed for a boy. That is the reason why I scolded thee."[22] We have
842 already mentioned the marriage custom of leading the bride to a Mairem[23] Shrine, at which the children throw stones and say, "So many boys and only one blue-eyed girl grant thou Mairem, to this our dear bride!" The groomsman then must repeat this prayer.[24] At an Ossetine marriage the Ram-god (Firi-dzuar) is invoked: "Look down upon us and grant that this our bride may give birth to boys healthy and fat as sheep!"[25] We have also mentioned the marriage ceremony of placing a little boy on the lap of the bride, so that she may soon give birth to a boy (*supra*, p. 122). Or again, while the groomsman describes a triple

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[16] Grabovskij, "Ekonomičeskij i domašnij byt žitelej gorskago učastka Ingulevskago okruga," SSKG, III (1870), pp. 19 f; Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 439.

[17] Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, II, p. 202.

[18] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, II, p. 63. A similar custom is found in Ossetia (Pčelina, *op. cit.*, pp. 99 f.

[19] Makalatija, "Iz starogo narodnogo byt Pšavov," SE, 1938, No. 1, pp. 110 f.

[20] Makalatija, *op. cit.*, p. 108; Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, I, p. 98.

[21] *Istorija*, I, ii, p. 110.

[22] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 158.

[23] Baddeley interprets "Mairam," "Mairem," "Mairan" as "Mary," i. e., the Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ. However, Mairam is a male god, the protector of women, the brother of Uastrdzh. (Cf. Pčelina's report on his expedition of 1934—1936, "Rodil'nye obyčai u Osetin," SE, 1937, No. 4, p. 86, *note* 2.)

[24] Baddeley, *l. c.*

[25] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 270.

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circle in the air with his special wedding club he cries out three times, "Prosperity! Prosperity! Prosperity!" Then he explains just what is meant by "prosperity": "nine boys to every blue-eyed girl."[26] On New Year's Day the Ossetine boys go round to everyone wishing, that throughout the New Year "men might kill many stags and women might bear sons only."[27] Cursin tells us how a certain Ossete, Bergisov by name, received a vision from above. Now, in such a case, any two wishes will be granted, provided the person thus favoured make also a third wish, which, however, must be an evil one. Bergisov's good wishes were that he and his sons might live happily, while his third wish was that his daughters might die.[28] The birth of a first-born male child is celebrated with unusually great festivity and joy.[29] The happy mother returns to her father's house, where a special feast is given in honour of the baby boy.[30] After the birth of a girl, the mother goes with the baby to a Shrine of Mairem with the hope that the next child will be a boy.[31]

Some of the Caucasian TARTARS express their preference for boys in the following manner: the bride wears a garment in which nine knots are tied, a sign that she must give birth to seven boys and only two girls. They also have the custom of placing a little boy on the bride's lap.[32]

§ 4. INFANTICIDE AND BIRTH CONTROL

Since Caucasians, as a general rule, crave for children, it is only to be expected that infanticide and birth prevention should be rare. We do not find the practice of infanticide in North Caucasia, especially not in Daghestan, where Islamic influence is strong.[33] Islamism regards female infanticide as a very serious crime. Some of the mountaineers of Georgia indeed practice female infanticide, but the practice is thoroughly un-Georgian. The Svans as late as the last half of the nineteenth century would kill their baby girls immediately after birth by stuffing ashes into the mouth and then throttling the child till it suffocated,[34] or, sometimes, the infant was simply allowed to starve.[35] The Khevsurs prevented birth mainly by abortion, a practice still common today. A young couple in Khevsuria may not have a child till after the fourth year of

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[26] Kovalevskij, *Coutume contemp.*, p. 17

[27] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 194.

[28] *Ossetini*, p. 82. Cf. Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 180.

[29] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, pp. 340 f.

[30] Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

[31] Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 102. If a girl is born, only a very simple ceremony takes place: the *avsin* (mother of the household) brings the infant to the hearth without saying a word. (See Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 99.)

[32] Mir-Gašim-bek Vezirov, "Neskolko svědenij o Tatarskich pover'jach," SMOMPK, IX (1890), No. 2, pp. 111 f.

[33] Kovalevskij, *Zakon*, II, p. 202.

[34] Byhan, *La civilisation caucasienne*, p. 111; Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, ii, p. 110.

[35] Dubrovin, *l. c.*

847 married life (in Pshavia, not before the third year[36]). The second child may not see the light of day till the seventh year after marriage, and the third child (just as in Pshavia[37]) must be the last.[38] We called the practice "thoroughly un-Georgian" because it is resorted to only when the mountaineers consider it unavoidable. The indescribable poverty of their land "drove" them to this painful extinction of baby girls. It was this same poverty that led the neighbouring South Ossetes (the Tualti, inhabitants of Nar, Tib, Mamisson and other *auls*) in the eighteenth century to expose or strangle their infant girls and to sell their boys into slavery in spite of their great longing for male children.[39] In Ossetia, [132] before the Revolution, physically deformed babes would be choked to death immediately after birth, without even being shown to the mother. Such deformed infants were killed regardless of sex, for the Ossetes believed that such infants owe their existence to evil spirits. Similarly, even today, deformed colts, calves and lambs are killed immediately after birth, because "they come from the evil spirits."[40] We have already mentioned that some Georgian mountaineers kill their baby girls in the belief that the next child will infallibly be a boy.[41]

§ 5. OTHER BIRTH CUSTOMS

1. The Couvade

546 The couvade, to my knowledge,[42] is not practiced anywhere in North Caucasia. We do find it among the SOUTHERN CAUCASIANS, where not a few traces of an ancient mother-right culture have survived. The couvade is upposed to be practiced by the Yassai of Sakataly primeval forest, southwest of Daghestan,[43] and according to Strabo by the West Iberians.[44]

2. Circumcision

304 This custom, wherever it is found in the Caucasus, is doubtless of Islamic origin.[45] The Mohammedan Ossetes were greatly averse to the practice till the mullahs succeeded in convincing them that all uncircumcised persons would have to spend their eternity without a head.[46]

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[36] Makalatija, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

[37] *ibid.*

[38] Hahn. *Bilder aus dem Kaukasus*, pp. 73 f.

[39] Kovalevskij, *Coutume contemp.*, p. 189.

[40] Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

[41] *Sugva*, p. 140.

[42] Unfortunately L. M. Melikset-Bekov's study on the couvade in the Caucasus (*K voprosu ob obychae kuvady na Kavkaze v svjazi s jazykovymi perežitkami matriarchatu*) is not at my disposal.

[43] Essad-Bey, *Der Kaukasus, Seine Berge, Völker und Geschichte*, p. 103.

[44] Strabo, iii.4, 17. Cf. N. Marr, *Der japhetische Kaukasus und das dritte ethnische Element im Bildungsprozess der mittelländischen Kultur*, p. 72; A. Baschmakoff, *Cinquante siècles d'évolution ethnique, etc.*, p. 85.

[45] For example, in Daghestan (cf. Reineggs, *op. cit.*, I, p. 191).

[46] Pčelina, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

This relatively mild punishment has been introduced mainly through Christian influence and on account of the dearth of women caused by female infanticide.[48]

The reports regarding the OSSETINE penalties are indeed confusing, until the proper local and temporal distinctions are made. Thus according to an ancient *adat* of the "frontier" Ossetes, as some Russian writers call them, the avenger of adultery would become the blood-enemy of the relatives of the adulterer. Later on a new customary law arose, giving the husband full right to kill the adulterer as well as the adulteress, with impunity.[49] The Ossetes of Tagaursk and Kurtalinsk usually killed the adulterer and threw the unfaithful wife out of the house.[50] The Alaghirs, on the contrary, were more merciful toward the adulterer and less so toward the adulteress. He was obliged to give the offended husband a horse and saddle, and then give him a feast, whereas the woman was mutilated (her nose was cut off) and then sent back to her father. If her husband forgave her, her family had to give him a horse and a gun.[51] In the collection of *adats* of 1841 (§ 41), the adulterer could be killed with impunity if caught *in flagranti*, whereas in the last decades of the nineteenth century Kovalevskij learned that the adulterer might indeed be wounded but not killed.[52] Inspite of these variations, *all* Ossetes have always believed that adultery was a very serious crime.

Formerly even mere suspicion justified the jealous husband to kill his wife and the suspected lover.[53] If he spared her life, he punished her publicly, bound her naked to a donkey and drove her through the village, whipping both the donkey and the miserable culprit, while the children and the girls of the *aul* would throw filth at her and sing jeering songs.[54]

Formerly to accept anything less than blood (that is, bloodwite) was considered a disgrace and even unlawful.[55]

The penalties for fornication were also very severe. The girl was set upon a donkey, her face to the tail and thus publicly driven through the village, jeered and spat upon by her fellow-villagers. And if she gave birth to an illegitimate child, the baby would be killed. If the mother's life was spared, she could marry only a widower,[56] or, of course, her lover.[57] Sometimes the lover was even forced to marry her or at least pay the usual *kalym*.[58]

The TURKS of the Caucasus are also very merciless when it comes to punishing adultery. If a Kumyk or Nogai husband or near relative catches a woman in the act of adultery, he may kill both culprits on the spot. If the

[48] Dirr, *l. c.*
[49] Pfaff's article in SSKG, II, pp. 274 f., cited by Dirr, AGKB, p. 80.
[50] Leontovič, II, p. 41
[51] Leontovič, II, pp. 44, 38.
[52] Kovalevski, *Coutume contemp.*, p. 349, *note* 1.
[53] S. Karginov, "Krovavaja mest' u osetin," SMOMPK, XLIV (1914), No. 3, pp. 204 f.
[54] Dirr, *l. c.*
[55] Karginov, *l. c.*
[56] Baddeley, *op. cit.*, I, p. 237.
[57] A. H. Post, *Grundriß der ethnol. Jurispr.*, II, p. 378.
[58] Dubrovin, *Istorija*, I, i, p. 339.

[usually divorce, refund of bride price, and half of usual bloodwite -- Analyst]
[In Georgia -- Analyst]